

Jeeah Kim, AL— 2025

In the weeks following the most rewarding chapter of my high school journey, I've found myself daydreaming, reminiscing, and simply sitting still—jaw slack, heart full—basking in the memory of Senate Youth. I've never lasted more than twelve hours before inevitably clicking through those pixie-dusted pictures, reaching for my notebook, or bidding goodnight to friends a hundred miles away. I often feel like the USSYP community is inescapable—and I'm grateful it is.

From the night of December third—when I sent the very first message in our Senate Youth group chat, unaware it would soon bloom into a flurry of inside jokes and personal stories that encroached beyond our first group chat—into LinkedIn profiles, Spotify playlists galore—to today, spring 2025, as we navigate college acceptances and futures in faraway cities, I rest easy knowing there will always be a delegate out there who will welcome me with open arms. Senate Youth was proof that professional connections—whether among peers, Military Mentors, or program directors—don't have to be cold or transactional. They can be messy and joyful—rooted in late-night giggles in the Mayflower Hotel, beach trip reunions, and glittery letters shipped across the country.

These friendships sprouted at round breakfast tables, where we jabbed at silly state stereotypes, leaned into them for fun, and shared local superstitions. Within the hour, we'd have moved onto discussions on cabinet confirmations, censorship, and polarization. Though our perspectives often clashed, we were more willing than ever to respect one another and truly listen. We weren't defensive, we were curious. Everyone had something to teach, and we knew that each delegate sipping grapefruit juice at our table had earned their seat, their views, *and* their juice. We trusted that every disagreement was rooted in deeply considered streams of thought. We knew we were shaped by different hometowns, values, and upbringings—and that didn't make anyone wrong. It made us human.

Washington Week humanized the flawless Instagram teenagers I expected to meet—and even more surprisingly, it humanized the political celebrities we're taught to view with suspicion. We wondered aloud, "are we being indoctrinated into thinking they're evil, or indoctrinated into thinking they're just chill dudes?"

I then decided—until I can distinguish indoctrination from truth with certainty, I'll choose to believe in the good of all people.

I learned that Justice Brett Kavanaugh—despite his controversial confirmation—is a father who visits his high school AP Government teacher and eats lunch with his fellow justices under a strict "no work talk" rule. That Secretary Marco Rubio—though often criticized for shifting stances—is driven by his "compassion for fellow man."

By nature, my co-delegates and I are opinionated and headstrong. We showed up at breakfast on day one scheming to interrogate every high-profile speaker, armed with debate tactics and tricky questions. But quickly, we mellowed out, learning to balance our youthful gusto with a reverence for learning.

Senate Youth was a sacred intersection where youth met adulthood—and 104 glowing people were gathered into that glowing horizon. I am honored to have learned about my brilliant co-delegates' favorite desserts, hobbies, and their mysterious, near-fictional lives back in fake-sounding cities in states whose names never previously crossed my mind. I am honored to have gained two friends in every American state.

In the best way possible, my world now feels small. It's because the real world feels more vast than ever in comparison. The inspiration that courses through all of our veins will ripple onward, a catalyst for positive change in every community we're placed in. Astronaut Tracy Dyson shared that looking down on earth from space—thinking of it as a swaddled infant—consolidated her faith in God. The earth is so intentionally created, so complicatedly orderly, and deserves our fiercest protection and defense. In that moment, I saw that same wonder reflected in my fellow delegates.

Washington Week has enhanced our dedication to our local communities, our country, and the tiny, mighty earth itself. I believe the Lord was deliberate in hand-picking each delegate to the 63rd class of the United States Senate Youth Program. It's the greatest miracle that we were all at the right place at the right time—and I am still in awe that I could be a part of it. I met my new friends for all the right reasons, and I stand firm in my belief that we will continue to look out for each other over years, and cheer each other on across borders. We are honored not just to make something great of ourselves, but to equip every lesson from this transformative experience to go beyond the light at the end of the tunnel. We have learned to become the light, let the world bear witness, and join the glow.